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UI students, faculty express concerns about efficiency review**Forum is first of three**

Some students, faculty and staff members at the University of Iowa are concerned about what the Board of Regents' sweeping "efficiency review" might mean for potential job and program cuts.

That sentiment was clear Friday during a public forum on the UI campus to discuss the efficiency review – the first of three town hall meetings scheduled at the state's public universities over the next few weeks.

Some of the 300-plus community members who attended the discussion wrote down questions on note cards that were read and answered by officials with the Board of Regents or representatives with Deloitte Consulting LLP, a firm hired to perform the efficiency review.

And many of those questions revolved around possible payroll reductions, departmental duplication and program consolidation. Outside the meeting, a handful of protesters raised signs of opposition and distributed fliers to passersby that called the "Deloitte audit" a "sham."

"The regents agenda is to squeeze more productivity out of already overstretched staff and force us to do more with less," according to the flier.

UI President Sally Mason, following the meeting, said she has heard from faculty and staff who are worried about what the review might mean for their employment.

"Any time you embark on an initiative like this, people are concerned about jobs, and legitimately so," Mason said.

But, she said, in the university's previous efforts to find efficiencies and cut costs on campus, administrators have tried to preserve as many jobs as possible.

"So hopefully we can do that here," she said.

The Board of Regents announced the sweeping efficiency review of its three public universities last year, formed a task force to head up the issue, hired Deloitte Consulting at an initial cost of \$2.5 million in February and kicked off the review on the university campuses last week.

Friday's public forum was the first of what officials say will be many opportunities for the public to chime in on the process, ask questions about proposals and make suggestions on ways to save money, time and resources.

Similar town hall meetings will take place on the Iowa State University campus next week and the University of Northern Iowa campus the following week.

Deloitte representatives said they also plan to conduct 200-some interviews on the UI campus in the next week with faculty and staff members, deans, provosts, administrators, departmental heads, students, union representatives and other stakeholders.

Those interviews will help supplement the massive data request the consultant made earlier this month for things like departmental budgets, organization charts, policies, processes and procedures. Mason said staff members put in long hours — some of them cutting short their spring breaks — to respond to the request quickly.

Deloitte is making similar requests of the other universities in an effort to become familiar with their operations and prepare for the massive review. Virginia Fraser, a senior manager with Deloitte, said the UI response to the data request was “clearly above the bar.”

“It was a significant request, and the timing was really quite remarkable,” she said.

The Board of Regents has said the efficiency review is necessary to sustain high-achieving public universities that are affordable. The last time the regents conducted a comprehensive efficiency review was 30 years ago, said board President Bruce Rastetter.

“And, quite frankly, we probably shouldn’t wait 30 years for the next review,” he said. “It should become a culture within the regents and the university systems.”

The portion Iowa’s universities receive in state funding has decreased dramatically over the years — falling from 70 percent to 30 percent — and Rastetter said the regents can’t continue to ask legislators for more money without vowing to be as efficient with those funds as possible.

Rastetter said again on Friday that any savings that emerge from this efficiency review will be reinvested into university programs that strengthen teaching, research and service missions while improving administrative processes and keeping down student debt.

But some students, staff and community members have expressed concern with the review process and the changes it might produce.

Harper Haynes, a UI doctoral student, questioned the transparency of the review. Because, although she attended Friday’s forum, Haynes said many of her peers were unable to due to class and work schedules.

“The timing of this shows that it’s not super open,” she said.

And Haynes said she has concerns about the regents’ use of an outside consultant that has done prior work finding efficiencies, making cost reductions, and managing employees in a business setting.

“We have concerns about using an outside consultant that usually looks a corporations, not universities,” she said.

Protesters upset about the audit interrupted the Board of Regents meeting on the UI campus earlier this month. Officials have said the review will be a lengthy process that will provide plenty of opportunity for public input and dialogue.